

REVIVAL OF AYURVEDA

Dr. Sharadini Dahanukar

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SHRI VARADENDRA CHARITY TRUST

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**SHREE
VARADENDRA CHARITY TRUST
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Sri Kashi Math Samsthan
85, Banaganga Road, Walkeshwar
Bombay — 400 006

H.H. Shrimad Varadendra Thirtha Swamiji of Kashi Math Samsthan was renowned for proficiency in Ayurveda among many other extraordinary skills. To honour the hallowed memory of Revered Swamiji, our present Pontiff H.H. Shrimad Sudhindra Thirtha Swamiji desired that a Trust to propagate Ayurveda should be set up. Accordingly, Shree Varadendra Charity Trust was formed in the year 1970, by H.H. Shrimad Sudhindra Thirtha Swamiji of Kashi Math Samsthan, for the advancement and propagation of Ayurveda system of medicine, and for that purpose, establish and support Ayurvedic Medical Institutions, for medical relief in general and through application of Ayurvedic Medicine in particular. The Trust is registered under Bombay Public Trust Act of 1950, and donations to the trust enjoy exemption under 80-G of the Income Tax Act, 1961.

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**His Holiness
Shrimad Varadendra Thirtha
Swamiji of
Shree Kashi Math Samsthan**

Shrimad Varadendra Thirtha Swamiji was born in 1866 and his poorvashram name was Giri Mallya. He was initiated into sanyas on 6.6.1876 at the age of 10 by his illustrious preceptor Shrimad Bhuvanendra Thirtha Swamiji.

The glory of Kashi Math reached new heights during the spiritual regime of Shrimad Varadendra Thirtha Swamiji, who is the Parama Guru of Shrimad Sudhindra Thirtha Swamiji, the present Swamiji. His was a many faceted personality. He was the patron of fine arts, literature and music. He had proficiency in mathematics, astrology, palmistry and ayurveda. He was an accomplished linguist. Besides the knowledge of Sanskrit, Malayalam, Konkani, Kannada, Tamil, Telugu, Marathi, Hindi and Gujarati, he had mastery over English, Latin, French, Portuguese, Urdu, German and Japanese languages. His was a unique

This booklet is not for sale, but for free distribution to public institutions and individuals, interested in Ayurveda. Till stocks last, a copy each will be sent by ordinary post, if name and full postal address and a 50 Paise stamp is sent to Mr. K.V. Bhat, Managing Trustee, Shree Varadendra Charity Trust, Unneetha, R.A. Kidwai Road, Wadala, Bombay 400 031.

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personality, versatility combined with strength of character. He was an ardent lover of children and reared animals and birds as pets.

The modern engineering had great fascination for him. Mechanical gadgets had greatly interested him. There were instances of his mending wall clocks and repairing time pieces. His mastery in the printing craft amazed people around him. His efforts in composing, printing and book binding was appreciated even at the Basel Mission Press, the leaders in the art of printing at Mangalore. At the printing press of the Math at Basrur, he worked at night and himself composed the entire manuscript of the "Brahmamantra". Camping at Coondapur on one occasion, he learnt that the telegraphic transmitting machine at the Post & Telegraph office had gone out of order. Immediately he asked some of his men to get the machine and, to the astonishment of all, he set it right. Here we must remind ourselves that Shri Swamiji did not receive any formal training anywhere in mechanical engineering, as he took initiation of sanyasya deeksha, at a young age of ten.

Shrimad Varadendra Swamiji may be aptly called the poet-pontiff. His composition about Veda Vyasa, the author of Bhagawata, and a scholarly work of Dwaitha Philosophy of Shri Madhwacharya are some of his monumental works in Sanskrit. He attained Mukti in Walkeshwar Kashi Math, Bombay, on 26.6.1914 barely at the age of 48 after initiating into Sanyas, Shrimad Sukrateendra Thirtha Swamiji, the preceptor of the present pontiff Shrimad Sudhindra Thirtha Swamiji.

— From an article by Shri K.G. Mallya
in the booklet "Panchaganga",
Shishya Sweekar Ceremony
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Revival of Ayurveda

By

Dr. Sharadini Dahanukar

Ever since the dawn of his turbulent history, man has evolved several ways of coping with illness. Different societies have looked for different substances and ways that may ease pain and elevate spirits. All ancient civilizations have thus developed their own medicinal systems. They reflect not only specific philosophies but also appear to be influenced by the then social beliefs and practices. Traditional medicine presents a unique configuration designed to be compatible with the needs of its own population. It is defined as the sum total of knowledge and practices relying exclusively on practical experience and observations handed down from generation to generation, verbally or in writing. Formal medical education and legal licence to practice is not required in traditional medicine; neither is there need to understand reasons for the effects obtained.

Ayurveda, siddha and unani systems of medicine are the most formal and organised amongst the traditional medical systems of India. These systems are fundamentally similar in their approach to health and disease. Ayurveda is considered to be the most ancient amongst them, and thus Ayurvedic thoughts and methods have had deep impact on the life-style of the people in India. Almost every household is aware of Ayurvedic treatment of common ailments. Certain plants of medicinal value are maintained in many houses.

Ayurvedic principles of healthy living are incorporated in day-to-day living, often in the form of religious rituals. They have also found

expression in several practices like use of spices in Indian cuisine. In fact, India's folk medicine is also related to Ayurveda which is not found in any other country.

Ayurvedic formulary is rich and diverse. It has grown and matured in the soil of India over the years. An uninterrupted contact with people for whom it was meant and intermingling with the folk medicine has enriched the materia medica of Ayurveda.

Ayurveda, as the name implies, is knowledge of life (**Ayu:** life **veda:** knowledge. It does not encompass only drug therapy. It is instead an entire philosophy of healthy life. The exact origins of Ayurveda are lost in the mists of antiquity. Original samhitas are written in non-Paninian form of Sanskrit. Since the date of Panini has been placed 7th B.C. by historians, Ayurveda must have existed at least that far back.

The earliest threads from which the fabric of Ayurveda was woven are seen in Atharvaveda and therefore Ayurveda is considered as a supplement of Atharvaveda. However, Atharvaveda describes only hymns and charms to ward off the evil. Systematised knowledge and philosophy evolved much later. The development of Ayurveda occurred in three phases.

The story of beginning of Ayurveda is common in all the ancient texts and goes thus — Ayurveda originated from Brahma, the fountainhead of knowledge, who passed the knowledge to Indra through Daksha Prajapati and Aswhinikumars. Seeing human misery, the great rishis met on holy slopes of the Himalayas. Rishi Bharadwaj was chosen to approach Indra to obtain the science of life. Bharadwaja gave this knowledge to other Rishis who transmitted it to their disciples through Guru Shishya **parampara**. Thus

from Atreya Punarvasu, Agnivesha along with five others learnt Ayurveda and established the school of medicine. Later Charaka revised Agnivesha Samhita and became famous. His compendium "Charaka Samhita" received great acclaim. Similarly, a school of surgeons was established by Dhanvantari and Sushruta.

During this time, surgery reached great heights. "Sushruta Samhita" describes several operative techniques and instruments which are used even today. Sushruta is known as the father of plastic surgery. As a matter of interest, in "Gentleman" Magazine of London, published in 1974, a report describes the method of nose repair or rhinoplasty as described by Sushruta. It is a matter of great pride that this is followed even today and is known as "Indian rhinoplasty". Surgical techniques were demonstrated to students by innovative teaching aids to develop surgical skills.

Several advanced centres of education existed in those days of which Nalanda and Takshashila became famous. Great emphasis was laid on preparation of medicinal formulations from plants. Several visitors came to learn the techniques and propagated Ayurveda to different countries.

Indian medical works were translated into Arabic under the patronage of Caliph Al mansur, they were translated into Tibetan, Mongolian and into other languages of Central and Northern Asia. Echoes of Indian medical works are traceable in works of Hippocrates and Plato (Greek & Roman medicine).

In spite of this rich heritage, today Ayurveda does not enjoy the same position as in the past, as a primary system of health care. Conquerors brought with them and

often enforced their own systems. India was conquered by the Moghuls who brought Unani system, followed by the British who introduced Allopathy. Allopathy gave rapid symptomatic relief and with formulations like capsules and pills, it was accepted with overwhelming response by patients. Ease of administration, and lack of dietary restrictions allowed better co-operation from patients. Thus, the changing fabric of society accepted allopathy. Historically speaking, a revolution occurred in the medical world in the middle of 19th century, when a young Austrian doctor Semmelweis introduced the concept of asepsis. In 1867, Lister attacked the microbe by spraying carbolic acid, in the process probably burning several square cms of skin and the hands of his assistant. Pasteur came later and brought in vaccination. In 1885 Paul Ehrlich introduced chemotherapy. It was left to Alexander Fleming, who stumbled on to some mouldy biscuits, to introduce the magic bullet of penicillin.

Collectively, they virtually eradicated infection and effectively overshadowed Ayurveda which did not offer miracle cures for epidemic killers of those days. Retrospectively, we can also say that being written in Sanskrit language, which was less understood and less taught by the western culture which was in the ascendant then, along with a lack of adequate and conclusive data led to its further setback. Scepticism became an inherent feature of modern medicine. In early 19th century, at the time of Renaissance, Cartesian scientific materialism was introduced into all human activities. This produced doubt where previously there had been belief and emphasised logic and intellect while belittling emotion and intuition.

Today, a scientist is trained not to take things for granted and to reject observations which are not validated by scientific methods. In spite of being full of real experiences, astute observation and fancy formulae based on inspiration, intuition, facts and results, traditional medicine was unable to analyse its own experience. It had no answers to queries raised by modern scientists, as it lacked the backing of scientific experimentation or statistics. It was termed as intuitive medicine and was relegated to the backbenches of alternative medicines.

However, Ayurveda was never totally uprooted from our country. In fact, it is still widely practised in India catering to the need of 75% population. Statistics show that the sales turnover of Indian medicine is 1.5. times that of modern medical remedies.

The last decade has seen a dramatic resurgence of interest in alternate systems of medicine. Today, more than 80% of the prescriptions issued by practitioners of modern medicine include one or more preparations containing herbal drugs. There are approximately 20 giant manufacturers and 1,200 licensed small manufacturers and with their aggressive salesmanship and promotion through mass media, they have been successful in popularising herbal medicine amongst the general public. Botanical export volumes have increased; developed countries being major importers. There are approximately 300 herbal products in U.K. market, a state of affairs which is rightly called as the 'Green Sweep'.

I would like to state my reservations about this apparently glowing state of affairs. The safety of herbal medicines is grossly overrated. Drugs which are administered, ignoring the principles of Ayurveda and

over-the-counter prescriptions, give rise to quackery and unexpected side effects. We must take cognisance of this as this will never give back Ayurveda its old glory. Herbal remedies are important in therapeutic armamentarium of Ayurveda but do not form the soul of Ayurveda. To understand the scientific truth of Ayurveda, to make the world accept Ayurveda, to give India a place on the world map of medicine. Ayurveda should be understood in terms of contemporary language, modified if and where necessary and practised according to its principles in totality.

Today, Ayurveda is a science shrouded in mystery. It is glorified by the romantic revivalists and rejected as out of hand, by hard core western oriented scientists. A bridge needs to be built between these two extremes. We have over the last 10 years tried to achieve this objective successfully. We have been able to prove the mechanism underlying the use of some plants in infection, liver damage, and stress related gastric damage. We have also interpreted in modern terms, the concept of "rasayana" used in Ayurveda. The work is published in national and international journals.

We have only proved using modern scientific techniques what Charaka had stated 2000 years ago. If we strive in our efforts to clear the mists surrounding this ancient science, its pictorial script can easily be unfolded to the world. As Manu had said in 'Manusmriti' "Let the light of knowledge from our country spread to the world for the betterment of mankind".

About the Author

Dr. (Mrs.) Sharadini A. Dahanukar graduated from the University of Bombay with M.B.B.S. in 1964, obtained M.D. in 1975 and a Ph.D in Pharmacology with a thesis on "Study of Influence of plants on Adaptive Processes." She has many research awards to her credit including Dhootpapeshwar Award and Indian Drug Manufacturers Association Award. She is author of more than 45 research papers, and co-author with Dr. Urmila Thatte of a book, 'AYURVEDA REVISITED' (Publisher: Popular Prakashan Pvt. Ltd.). This text is based on a public lecture delivered by her under the auspices of Shri Varadendra Charity Trust on 11th February 1989 in Bombay. One of her areas of special interests is Ayurveda, the traditional medicine in India. She has given lectures on Ayurveda in West Germany, Switzerland, Indonesia and Australia.

The views expressed in this publication are those of the author. The Trust has published this booklet for propagating the value of Ayurveda and need for revival of its rich heritage.

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